

MEAP: Officials say don't compare 1998 results

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Don't compare the 1998 test scores to earlier public school results on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program results, say state officials.

"They aren't comparable to previous years' results," Chris Schram of the Department of Education staff told the State Board of Education Nov. 5. "The tests are shorter. They're given at a different time of year (April through June to 11th graders). And we have different definitions of the standards."

Nevertheless, the board's news release said, "We are pleased by the continued progress shown by the number of students who meet Michigan's standards. There are still too many students who are not able to reach those standards, and we are working to correct that."

State officials see three problems:

■ Large pockets of students

who, with parental approval, refuse to take the tests in math, science, reading and writing.

"I keep hearing that college and business don't pay attention to the test results," said Dorothy Beardmore, R-Recheater, the board's senior member. "Neither is accurate. The business community in Berrien County has made concerted efforts to use them. Some higher educational institutions are using results for placement purposes."

Herb Moyer, D-Temperance, one of the newer members, agreed that skipping the tests "is a phenomenon of the last two or three years."

"I want to get at this issue of taking the test," said Art Ellis, superintendent of public instruction and head of the Education Department.

Students in affluent suburbs such as Birmingham and Northville have boycotted MEAP tests in droves. The tests are designed to guarantee employ-

ers, in particular, that students have mastered academic material, not merely sat in classes for 12 years and collected a paper diploma.

MEAP tests have a second purpose: to guide curriculum without micro-managing what math or literature courses a school provides.

These scores are important to the state, to the school and to the students, Beardmore said.

■ Low scores by minorities.

Blacks had 3.2 percent "exceeding standards" (highest score) and nearly 60 percent "not endorsed" (failing). Whites had more than 24 percent "exceeding" and 15 percent failing.

Asian and Pacific Islander students topped the white scores at the top of the scale.

"Very upsetting," said board president Kathleen Straus, D-Detroit. "We have to concentrate our resources." Later she added, "We've got to look beyond the school" for reasons.

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Chris Schram
—State Board of Education

■ Press handling.

Dr. Diane Smolen of the department staff was unhappy that some large newspapers got the MEAP results before the State Board got it. "We wish schools would have a week" to study them before they became public. But individual school districts and intermediate districts chose to make them available a week prior to the State Board meeting.

"It's uncontrollable," said Ellis. "There are 500 school districts.

There will always be some who release them early."

There no longer is a problem, Ellis went on, about the content of the tests. "Everybody who has looked at these tests says they're good."

Schram of the department staff agreed that the tests, particularly math, were "practical life problem solving" questions.

For example: How much will it cost a group of three adults and two students to visit an aquarium on a Wednesday when there is a special price? Normal tickets are \$11.25 for adults, \$8.25 for seniors and student and \$5 for children 3-12.

The catch is that on Wednesday there's a \$2 discount for a third adult when you buy two adult tickets at the regular price.

Correct answer: \$48.25. But the student must get more than the number — he or she must also explain it and see patterns

of mathematical relationships.

Another math question is about a residential lot measuring 120 by 100 feet. The lot has a 40 by 50 house, a 25 by 25 garage and a 25 by 50 driveway. The owner wants to re-seed the lawn.

Which estimate is cheaper — the Greenery's at a flat \$750 or the Lawn Shop's at 10 cents a foot. This reporter's answer: Lawn Shop bid would be \$612.50, so Greenery's \$750 is cheaper.

There are four levels of MEAP scores: "exceeded" standards, "met" standards, "at basic level" and "not endorsed." The first three are considered passing. Michigan 11th graders got these passing scores:

58.9 percent in reading.
60.5 percent in math.
51.7 percent in science.
56.6 percent in writing.

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